

VZCZCXRO9849
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #3238/01 2810538
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 070538Z OCT 08
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9835
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 003238

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/06/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: D PRESSES PARLIAMENTARY SPEAKER ON SECURITY
AGREEMENT, MINORITIES

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Speaker Mashadani told DepSec Negroponte that a majority in the parliament supported the bilateral security agreement, but that many deputies would not support it publicly. Noting that other countries benefit from security agreements with the U.S., he said the continued American presence "off the Iraqi streets, but on bases in Iraq" was vital to deter Iran. He pointed to the irony of many hardline Arab nationalists, now worried about Iranian power, secretly supporting a continued American military presence to protect Iraq's Arab identity and prevent a reigniting of sectarian fighting. Even the Sadrists, he predicted, would support the SOFA in the end because they too do not trust Iran. Mashadani said a strong public information campaign that labeled those who opposed the agreement as promoters of Iranian influence would help. The Deputy Secretary thanked Mashadani for his support of the agreement and said that the U.S. seeks a strong strategic relationship with Iraq. Iraq's drive to end imposition of Chapter 7 status means that the U.S. and Iraq need a bilateral agreement to form the legal basis for continued American troop presence. Mashadani pledged strong support for the agreement during the ratification process and asked for close cooperation with the U.S. as the process moves ahead. He insisted that a new treaty ratification law -- which could require either a simple majority or a two-thirds majority for passing the security agreement -- was needed before the vote. Mashadani also promised that the parliament would reinsert minorities' quotas into the provincial elections law. End Summary.

Mashadani -- American Troops Needed to Deter Iran

12. (C) Council of Representatives (CoR) Speaker Mahmoud Mashadani opened his October 3 meeting with Deputy Secretary Negroponte with a 35-minute monologue. Although somewhat rambling, his briefing hit two strong themes, which Mashadani sees as closely related -- the need for a bilateral security agreement with the United States and his fear of Iranian influence in Iraq. Mashadani fears that, without an agreement, Teheran's malign influence will only increase. "We have no strategic deterrent," Mashadani said. With Iran increasingly menacing, either Iraq needed such a deterrent or American forces must stay. Saying that Iraqis now needed to exert themselves to improve their security forces, Mashadani assured Negroponte that Iraq is capable, but could not succeed "without the help of our friends for the next ten years." American troops should leave Iraqi streets, but stay on bases in Iraq, he said.

13. (C) Iraq and the United States, Mashadani continued, must persuade their adversaries, including Iran, Shia special militia groups, and al-Qaeda, that they can't defeat the Iraqi people. He told Negroponte that he worked every day in the CoR with extreme nationalists. He understood them, he said, because he himself had "grown up in that environment." To reform them, he said, is cheaper and easier than to eliminate them. Part of this is political -- extremists like

Jaysh al-Islami and Ansar as-Sunna who had opposed democracy now see the virtues in democratic processes. They want to defend democracy (and keep the Americans in Iraq), he claimed. Citing another political example, Mashadani claimed that Prime Minister Maliki had also come from an Islamist extremist environment, but had grown more moderate with the responsibility of national office. Mashadani added that providing more essential services and better education would reduce the influence of extremists -- it would make the "incubator" that breeds extremism smaller, he said. Mashadani concluded that Islamists ("like me") should be in the mosques but secularists should be in government.

Getting the Votes for the Security Agreement

¶4. (C) Mashadani then explained how he intended to get the security agreement through the CoR. Groups that had opposed an agreement, he said, were now beginning to feel that the Coalition was part of the solution. In fact, he said, some extremists support an agreement more than some moderates, because the U.S. presence inhibits sectarian violence. Mashadani added that even hardline Arab nationalists perceive that the vacuum that would exist in Iraq after a rapid American withdrawal would be filled by Iran. Ironically, he concluded, to defend the Arab identity of Iraq, the Americans had to stay on. Mashadani even claimed that, in conversations with Sadrists members of the CoR, they had indicated an openness to an agreement and a desire to open channels with the United States -- "but Muqtada won't let us." (Note: In an aside, Mashadani noted that the Sadrists as Arab nationalists had no genuine tie to Iran. Only the

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competition between the Sadr family and the Hakim family drove the Sadrists to seek help from Iran. Resolving that competition would allow the Sadr family to resume their normally anti-Iran stance, he perceived. End Note) Mashadani thought even Muqtada could easily be persuaded "if we got him to an Arab country." Still, Mashadani acknowledged that Sadrists were at present among those who oppose an agreement even if it's in the country's interest.

¶5. (C) Some groups, Mashadani said, support an agreement but can't say so publicly. This was true, for example, with the Sunni Arabs (Mashadani's group) and Fadilah. The Kurds, he predicted, were "guaranteed" and 90 percent of Tawafuq would vote for the agreement, as would Fadilah out of its fear of Iran. Because of the hidden majority for an agreement, Mashadani is considering holding a secret, electronic vote. A secret ballot would protect deputies who are hesitating and afraid. The CoR will vote for the agreement "not from love, but from interest."

Selling It to the Public

¶6. (C) Mashadani emphasized the need to move quickly to persuade the public that the agreement was in Iraqi interests in order to avoid charges that those voting for the accord "had sold Iraq." Time was short, he noted, and we had to convince the Iraqi people that there was no alternative -- other than more Iranian influence -- to an agreement. He suggested labeling anyone opposing the agreement as a "Persian" (he used the Arabic word "ajami"). "Real" Arabs would support the SOFA, he predicted. Mashadani pointed to the many other countries like Kuwait, Bahrain and Japan that have security arrangements with the U.S. and benefit from them. However, the SOFA would be opposed vigorously by Teheran, he warned. "I'm not afraid of anything but the Iranian lobby." He had many Iranian friends and contacts, he said, and had visited Teheran before. He would do so again in order to plumb the reasons behind Iran's rejection of a security agreement. Given the gains Iran had made in Iraq due to the Americans' allowing Iranian friends to come to power, he found the Iranian attitude against the Americans in

Iraq mystifying.

Negroponte Cites Need for Legal Basis

¶17. (C) The Deputy Secretary noted that this was his fifth visit to Iraq since ending his posting as Ambassador to Baghdad in March of 2005. The situation had improved considerably in all respects and Iraq was now in a particularly interesting period. There was a real need, he said, to agree on how we proceed together in 2009. The real driving force was Iraq's desire to no longer be under Chapter ¶17. If the United States is to stay in Iraq after this December, we need a bilateral agreement that provides a new legal basis for the troops' presence. Negroponte expressed appreciation for Mashadani's leadership and for the important role he will play in leading the agreement through the CoR. He asked about the legislative process with respect to the security agreement.

New Treaty Law Essential

¶18. (C) Mashadani noted that, according to the Constitution, the CoR must ratify all international agreements and treaties. Ultimately, he said, the CoR must pass a new treaty law because there would be a "hurricane" in the CoR if the security agreement was passed without a new law. It would give extremists a pretext for claiming that the CoR had sold out Iraq. The content of the treaty law, Mashadani continued, would determine the quorum required. Summing up the state of current discussions of the matter, he said that, for example, "strategic agreements" might require an absolute majority or a two-thirds majority, economic agreements might require an absolute majority, and cultural agreements might be passed with a simple majority. Pressed on the point by Negroponte, however, Mashadani retreated, saying that nothing had been decided and it could happen that the security agreement could be passed by a simple majority. Mashadani then described the normal, three-reading legislative process that would govern the agreement's passage. He would, he said, use his skills in leading CoR sessions "to silence those listening to outside forces." Shia Islamist party Dawa-Tanzim would oppose the SOFA, he was sure, but Mashadani said he would shut them up by reminding them that were it not for the Americans, he and Dawa-Tanzim would both still be in exile.

"What's Plan B?"

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¶19. (C) Departing momentarily from Arabic, Mashadani asked about "Plan B." The CoR might fail to pass the agreement, and Mashadani wondered what would happen then. The Government would need a back-up plan. In this case, the CoR's role would be to support the Government in its efforts to find an alternative. Winding up discussion of the security agreement, Mashadani asked that the U.S. stay in close contact with him throughout the process, in order to identify obstacles and solutions. Negroponte assured him that we look forward to working closely together. Mashadani told Negroponte that he had read the text of the agreement (presumably, a version published some weeks ago on web-sites) and had found it good. "Even my extremist wife liked it." Negroponte agreed that it was a good document, with many advantages for Iraq. He assured Mashadani that the United States shares his concerns about Iraq.

Minorities in Provincial Elections

¶10. (C) Negroponte said that he would like to raise the quotas for minority groups in provincial elections. Mashadani noted that the law does not distinguish among Arabs

and minorities like Christians and Yezedis, nor does it marginalize anybody. Christian areas, he predicted, would elect Christian representatives. That said, Mashadani went on, he himself had inserted Article 50 (on minority representation) into the elections law that had passed (and was soon afterward vetoed) on July 22. The CoR had voted for it, but the Presidency Council had vetoed it. It had then failed to pass on the next vote, on September 24, much to his surprise, Mashadani claimed. Mashadani noted the irony that the Presidency Council, having vetoed language on minority set-asides, was now calling for it to be restored.

¶11. (C) Mashadani assured Negroponte that the CoR will pass the missing article. "In Iraq," he said, "we have no problems with minorities, only majorities." (Comment: It isn't clear how the minorities language might be restored. One possibility is an amendment to the provincial elections law once it has officially become law, but little time remains for such a maneuver. End Comment) Negroponte expressed the hope that the problem could be solved without reopening the entire law, which has many good features, like open candidate lists. He congratulated Mashadani on it, who then called the law his best accomplishment.

¶12. (C) DepSec staff has cleared this cable.
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